

Spoken



CCM 2013 Testimony

900 CHAPEL STREET, 9th FLOOR, NEW HAVEN, CT 06510-2807 PHONE (203) 498-3000 FAX (203) 562-6314

Your source for local government management information www.ccm-ct.org

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

March 11, 2013

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 92% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

CCM supports the following bill:

- SB 901 "*An Act Concerning Post-Election Audits*" – would modify the post-election audit requirement by (1) no longer requiring a manual audit and (2) reducing the threshold of precincts to be audited from 10% to 5%. This will provide substantive administrative and fiscal burdens on local election officials and their budgets.

CCM sees the following election-related bills as helping to improve and streamline election related processes:

- SB 775 "*An Act Encouraging the Use of Technology-Based Tools by Poll Workers*" – would provide for greater access to electronic voting databases for assisting voters.
- SB 777 "*An Act Concerning More Rapid Identification of Voters by Poll Workers*" – would provide for using the bar code on the back of government issued identifications as a way to identify voters.
- HB 6291 "*An Act Concerning Absentee Voting by Certain Town Officials*" – would allow election officials to vote by absentee ballot so they can focus their attention on Election Day.
- SB 1058 "*An Act Concerning the Retention of Unused Absentee Ballots*" – would allow for the disposal of unused absentee ballots after a certain period of time.
- HB 6428 "*An Act Enabling Towns to Check Voters in Electronically*" – would allow for new check-in methods to be employed.

CCM has concerns with the following bill:

- HB 6578 "*An Act Concerning the Timely Filing of Election Returns*" – would fine election moderators if they fail to file certain election related information with the municipal clerk. CCM wants to ensure that the requirements and deadlines are very clear, to ensure moderators fully understand their obligations and timelines. In addition, we want to be certain that municipalities would be held harmless from being responsible in any way for such fine.

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CCM supports Senate Bill 773 "*An Act Concerning the Siting of State Agency Facilities*".

This bill would require, when siting a state agency facility in a municipality with a population greater than one hundred thousand, that the state shall first consider locations in the central business district of that municipality if the municipality has adopted an ordinance requiring such consideration or siting.

State facilities should not have the ability to trump the desires and design of the local community in which they propose to site.

CCM urges the committee to support this bill.

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CCM supports Senate Bill 778 "*An Act Concerning the Reduction of Polling Places for Primaries*" and HB 6427 "*An Act Concerning Polling Places for Primaries*".

These bills would allow municipalities, under certain circumstances, to designate polling places other than those used during a general election - allowing local registrars of voters to achieve a level of savings by consolidating polling places, when appropriate. It is estimated that a savings in excess of \$10,000 could be achieved for a small town.

CCM urges consideration for the following thresholds and parameters to be included in the proposal, in order to ensure any such changes in polling places do not hamper the voting process:

1. Apply to municipalities with populations of 40,000 or less with historic voter turnout for the same office on the ballot of 40% or less.
2. Require the designation of new polling place(s) no later than 120 days prior to Primary Day.
3. Require notice to be provided to the candidates, Secretary of the State, applicable municipal town clerk, and electors within certain timeframes.
4. Require signs to be posted at polling places to provide guidance to electors as to proper location to cast their vote.

CCM urges the committee to incorporate the items outlined above and favorably report the a proposal to allow for saving to be achieved through the consolidation of polling places during primaries.

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CCM supports SB 902 "*An Act Concerning the Publication of Legal Notices in Newspapers*", which would provide significant relief from a long standing and outdated mandate on local governments by modifying the requirement to post the full text of all legal notices in local newspapers.

Municipalities are not seeking complete repeal of the law, but rather a **modification** that would:

1. **Allow for publishing notice of the availability of a document in local newspapers**, along with a summary and clear instructions as to how to get additional information or the complete text of the public document - *municipal office where a hard copy can be obtained, a contact name and phone number that could be used to get more information, and the web address where an online version can be found.*
2. **Require newspapers to have a designated section for all such public notices to be listed**, for ease of finding by the reader, along with a **listing in the publications' table of contents.**

The purpose of Section 1-2 of the state statutes was to ensure the public is provided information on governmental actions and issues that may impact them. To this end, local governments spend millions of dollars every year publishing lengthy documents, in their entirety, in local publications.

The internet has become a tool widely used for the dissemination of a wide array of information on all levels. **The State itself has moved to a paperless system in similar ways** - the General Assembly several years ago stopped printing certain bills and legislative documents, and PA 12-92 shifts all proposed state agency regulations to be placed online instead of published in paper form.

It is important to keep in mind:

- The Internet is *accessible to everyone*. All local libraries are equipped with computers at no cost to the users. Newspapers must be purchased to be read.
- Internet sites *can be accessed from anywhere in the world at any time*. Newspapers can only be purchased in the region they serve.

- Public notices placed on Internet sites *can remain there indefinitely*, making the information available for a greater amount of time. Notices placed in newspapers are only there for the allotted time paid for.

No one is seeking to hamper the public's right to know; rather towns and cities are seeking a more cost effective and efficient manner in which to provide the information.

In the 21st century, the quickest, most transparent and cost-effective way to get information to the most amounts of residents is via the Internet. It is no secret that the Internet is where people shop, communicate, do their banking, and share general information. *Municipal and state websites have become a critical lifeline that link living rooms to their governments instantly.* Just like the rise of local cable access stations, the Internet and municipal/state websites have allowed governmental activities to emerge even further into the public spotlight. Despite these obvious advances, in 2013, Connecticut's hometowns continue to be mandated to post their legal notices in printed newspapers with dwindling circulations.

Newspapers have had a captive client of municipal governments for years and have taken advantage of this mandate by often charging their highest advertising rate for this service. In addition, these legal notices are used as filler throughout the paper to take up excess space – they are not placed in a coordinated manner to allow readers ease of access to the information.

Don't be mistaken, this issue is not about freedom of information for the newspapers – it is all about money. Similar to the police blotters that newspapers feel are necessary to publish, they can certainly do the same for any other documents they also feel are important enough to do so.

With the state budget again facing large deficits and municipalities bracing for cuts in state aid, now is the time for the legislature to make meaningful mandates relief for towns and cities - not to mention the fact that this can be provided at no cost to the State.

CCM urges the committee to support legislation to (1) **allow for publishing notice about the availability of a document in local newspapers**, along with a summary and clear instructions as to how to get additional information or the complete text of the public document - *municipal office where a hard copy can be obtained, a contact name and phone number that could be used to get more information, and the web address where an online version can be found* – and - (2) **require newspapers to have a designated section for all public notices** to be listed, for ease of finding by the reader, along with a **listing in the publications' table of contents.**

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CCM opposes the following bills:

- House Bill 5604 "*An Act Eliminating the Municipality exemption from the Contract Compliance Requirements in State Contracts*" – would remove the municipal exemption from certain contract issues with state contracts.
- HB 6579 "*An Act Concerning the Prequalification of Subcontractors, Removing the Municipal Exemption from the Set-Aside Program and the Percentage of Contracts Reserved for Minority Business Enterprises*" - among other things, would remove the municipal exemption from the set-aside program requirements and to modify the percentage of contracts reserved for minority business enterprises by distinguishing women from minorities.

CCM is concerned with the implications these proposal could have on local budgets and the residential and business property taxpayers that fund them. Towns and cities are currently facing the potential for significant state aid reductions, based on the current proposed budget, not to mention the looming possibility of a greater than \$700 million loss in revenues if elimination of the car tax is indeed implemented. No new or expanded mandates should be placed on the backs of towns and cities, especially when a comprehensive fiscal note has not yet been done to illustrate the impact of such proposals.

CCM urges the committee to take no action on these bills.

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CCM supports House Bill 5051 "*An Act Expanding Municipal and State Reverse Auction Authority to Include the Purchase of Services*".

This bill would provide for expanded use of the reverse auction authority for municipalities, providing the potential for additional costs savings.

Towns and cities are currently facing the potential for significant state aid reductions, based on the current proposed budget, not to mention the looming possibility of a greater than \$700 million loss in revenues if elimination of the car tax is indeed implemented. Any proposal that could help local governments reduce their costs should be supported.

CCM urges the committee to support this bill.

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CCM supports House Bill 1057 "*An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the State Librarian Concerning E-Government and the Preservation, Authentication and Management of Electronic Records*".

This bill would increase land recording fees for the purpose of funding needed investments into preserving and managing electronic records, on both the local level and the state level.

As technology advances and governmental records management struggles to keep pace, needed investments to help state and local entities address are important. Electronic records storage can help to reduce physical storage space needed and preserve documents in a more easily searchable manner.

CCM urges the committee to support this bill.

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